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HARDING'S REACTION TO GIGANTIC TASK

Microscopic Analysis of the President's Work and Play

Ten Weeks in the White House Facing Problems of Infinite Importance Have Not Marred His Kindly Spirit nor Ruffled His Critical Calm---Evidence in Plenty Chief Executive Has a Dangerous Fighting Side if Occasion Demands, but His Strongest Factor Apparently Is the Ability to Get the Best From Others

WHEN, on March 20 last, the Magazine Section of THE NEW YORK HERALD printed "Through a Day's Work With Harding," the President had been in office about a fortnight. The article by Mr. Hill was the result of careful study at first hand at the White House.

To-day the same writer presents in the accompanying article a wonderfully diverse story on the same general topic, but with the distinct and added value of much greater time for observation, and over a two months' period that shows how President Harding has buckled down to the gigantic task of handling the nation's business. Its microscopic detail makes it not only more interesting than the first story, but infinitely more valuable to HERALD readers.

By EDWIN C. HILL.

Special Correspondence to THE NEW YORK HERALD.

New York Herald Bureau, Washington, D. C., May 21.

PRESIDENT HARDING has been "on the job" about ten weeks—time enough to set in motion the principal projects contained in the Republican prospectus, along with a few benevolent schemes of his own devising; not time enough to warrant oracular conclusions as to the breadth of his statesmanship, the scope of his vision or the likelihood of his success in doctoring the prosperity of the country to normal health.

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It might not be a bad idea to think of Harding as a good, conscientious, sympathetic general practitioner (with no claim to being a specialist) sitting at the bedside of a patient, whose temperature is subnormal after a spree which has played hob with stomach, circulatory system and nerve centres. The good doctor is known to possess a lot of common sense, a great deal of human sympathy and a trace at least of the "royal touch," that singular virtue of rulers which, according to tradition, enabled them to exercise ills by a kind of laying on of hands. Dr. Harding has already taken from his handbag, with its rows of labelled tubes, certain specifics that should be beneficial to any sick person, and he is intently studying the patient's symptoms to the end of hitting upon special treatment.

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The circulatory system (the railroads) bothers him. He tells his friends that if Uncle could get his blood running freely other distressing ailments would be very apt to disappear. Then there is the stomach, which is not giving very good metabolism. The body is not getting the quality of nourishment it needs or that it is really used to. Something has to be done to build up the stomach, which is the country's productive capacity. Then, too, the nerve centres, communications by mail and through the air, are run down. Dr. Harding has a number of specialists in these matters to assist him—Dr. Hoover, very noted for successful methods to enrich blood; Dr. Hays, nerve specialist; Dr. Hughes, cerebral specialist. But the responsibility for getting Uncle upon his feet can't be divided.

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The President comprehends this and the people seem to understand it very sympathetically, prepared to follow the treatment very patiently. The people seem to be prepared to extend to the physician all the time he needs to get his cure under way. The country seems deliberately to have created a reserve of restraint and patience in Harding's case—a reserve that may conceivably last several years without being exhausted. Certainly few Presidents began their work in the kind of atmosphere of affectionate confidence that Harding breathes daily. It is hard to recall an instance of such general willingness to bridle partisanship and close the teeth upon criticism. In Congress, especially in the Senate, there are irrepressibles among the vanquished that remind one of coyotes circling a camp in the nighttime and uttering ululations of resentment because they cannot get at the bacon and beans. But these don't count for much in the general scheme of things, except to make folk grin.

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The country is with its Chief by a bigger majority than it gave him last November, if the various means of interpreting public sentiment are still reasonably trustworthy. They realize the size of the job he has tackled. They realize, too, that it is not a job that can be completed in a few months or even in a few years. Apparently all the people expect from the President is that he shall make a sensible beginning along practical lines. They are observing him keenly right now to see what he does for a beginning, to gauge the trend of his mind, to watch his ways of dealing with conflicting groups of opinions, to note how he can handle certain gentlemen in the Senate who are made out of what the French call "fierce stuff." They are for him. They want him to win. They are betting on him. They seem to like the cut of his jib. Everything he does interests the people—the most trivial things. Their interest in him and in Mrs. Harding is a voracious thing craving enormous amounts of food.

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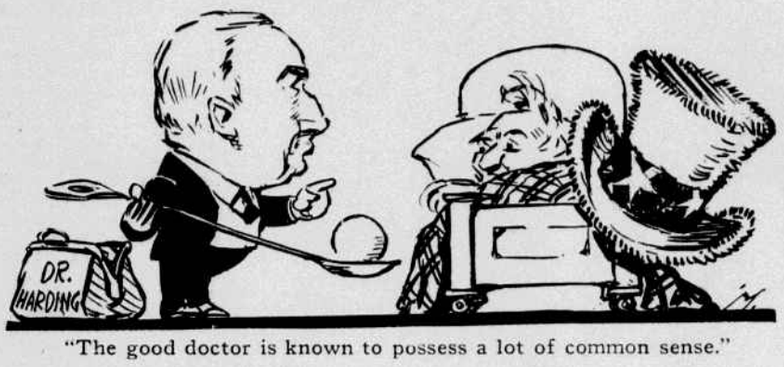
The President and Mrs. Harding have



"The good doctor is known to possess a lot of common sense."

posed for more "group" pictures in the short time they have been in the White House than have all the other Presidents and First Ladies put together in the same length of time. Motion picture "news reviews," the newspapers, magazines, societies of various sorts incessantly appeal for photographs, and the Hardings are immensely complaisant. Maybe their responsiveness will wear out some day, but up to the present they have never refused a request where compliance was possible, and they have submitted to some very unreasonable requests. They have been "shot at" so often that doubtless they could dine under an uninterrupted bombardment without distress.

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In this matter of posing for pictures the President and Mrs. Harding simply follow a line of reasoning they have taken ever since Will Hays chucked over the long distance telephone, on the night of May 2: "You're in!" This is that they actually belong to the people. They very quickly perceived that the price of the Presidency is the surrender of privacy. They prepared to give themselves to the people in most of their visible aspects. They were—are—honest and sincere about this. There is no bunkum about it. In the campaign there was a lot of silly talk about Harding being a kind of "stuffed shirt." This was a not very elegant way of suggesting that he was merely a comely imitator of really great men, with nothing much himself in the way of originality and forcefulness. This talk of course was all drivel. Whatever his actual capacity may be—and time and stress alone will demonstrate that—he is distinctly not an imitator of men. He is entirely himself for whatever that is going to turn out to be in history. He has his own ways of thinking and doing. He can be as stubborn as a Missouri mule or as pliant as a willow wand against or for propositions he has thought out for himself, or as instinct guides him.

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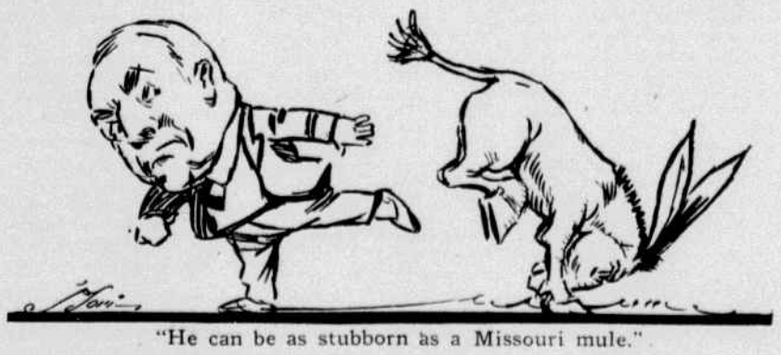
In these random comments it may not be improper to state that a good many months of observation on the part of the writer leads to the conclusion that Warren G. Harding is and intends to be his own boss—Mrs. Warren G. excepted. Any Senate oligarchy that attempted seriously to control the decisions of the President would receive several thousands of the shock units that Mr. Volta gave his name to. This fact is very thoroughly comprehended in the



"He can be as stubborn as a Missouri mule."

Senate, as Mr. Borah mournfully admitted the other day in answer to some hectoring on the part of Mr. Harrison of Mississippi.

Harding is not indolent, as Washington was. He likes to work. But it is not especially easy for him to start work. He always gets things done, but he avoids beginning some of them until he is in just the right creative mood—then slam bang energy till the job is done. In campaigning for the Presidency he never wrote out a speech until he had to do so. He put off preparing his inaugural address until almost the last moment. In all these instances he knew pretty much what he was going to say and how, but he flinched from the concentration of building out the structure with words. He might put off a task all day, but he would work furiously and cheerfully all night to get it completed in time. As they say out in Ohio, "He's a horse for work," but he likes to work in his own time, as the mood hits him. The President is something temperamental for the section of the country that produced him.

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Had not destiny edged him into newspaper work and politics he would have made a first-rate sportsman, man of physical action. There's a good deal of Roosevelt about Harding, although the statement may surprise many folk. He loves to be out of doors, to give his big healthy body a chance. In former years when he was lighter footed, he used to wield a mean racket at tennis, but now that he is getting toward the 200 pound class the strenuosities of this game are more than his physician wants him to essay. Golf is his speed—a long, leisurely game, requiring not so much agility or violence. He doesn't like hunting, because he does not like to kill things. He's a tender hearted person, this President of ours, and I have actually seen his eyes fill with tears at the distress of a mongrel dog in the street that had been run over by an automobile and that limped forlornly dangling a broken paw. A dog of his was poisoned years ago by something calling itself human, and if he could have found the thing who spread the poison he would have beaten its face to blue pulp. He said he would have done so, and anybody who knows him never would doubt either inclination or competency.

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Harding is a he man and a scrapper when real occasion demands. It's rather curious to consider, but he has what pugilists call the "fighting face." It's an expression, not a type of features. It's the concentration of fierce and indomitable purpose stamped upon ordinarily mild human countenances. It's the look that goes back to the Later Paleolithic and to the perils of the first true men—the look, with clinched jaws, set lips and deep set blazing eyes that even old Sabre Tooth found strangely disturbing in the pit of his stomach as he faced the new, determined creatures guarding their holes in the rocks. Get Harding mad—and he can get mad, the kind of mad that good men are sometimes obsessed with when things go unbelievably, stupidly wrong; the kind of mad that caused Washington to damn St. Clair's eyes; the kind of man that used to make Colonel Roosevelt slam his fist down upon the table in the White House study and tell a certain group of Senators to go to—well, somewhere else.

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Toward the close of the campaign a crack brain bobbed up to spread absurd but malevolent slander touching the name of Harding. It made the victim so mad that he wanted action. He reacted in the old, primitive, 20,000-year-tested way. His instinct was to fight, to get a grip on this poisoner and beat him up. If he had had his way he would have seized a chance to meet the slanderer in the street for a biff-bang settlement. It took some persuading to talk him out of this perfectly human intention.

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When he gets his concentration going he becomes extraordinarily intent on whatever he is doing, work or play. As long as matters are moving smoothly the President is apt to take things easily. If his work is going well or if he is ahead at whatever game he may be playing he doesn't strain himself. He moves in an effortless sort of way both mentally and physically. There is much grace about the man's expressiveness. But when there are obstacles cropping up in work or the other fellow is ahead of him at play, a new Harding rises to the surface. One gets a glimpse of that fighting face. The gentle, amiable curves harden into lines. Jaw sets like granite. Eyes seem to recede into their pits and to take on a kind of menacing glare. Muscles tighten. The will to win is at work. Even in such inconsequential performances as a game of shuffleboard upon the deck of a ship I have seen the President display just this tendency to harden into fierce effort. A man who caught that glare one time remarked: "He'd be a bad man to cross if he really got mad. I wouldn't want the job. No."

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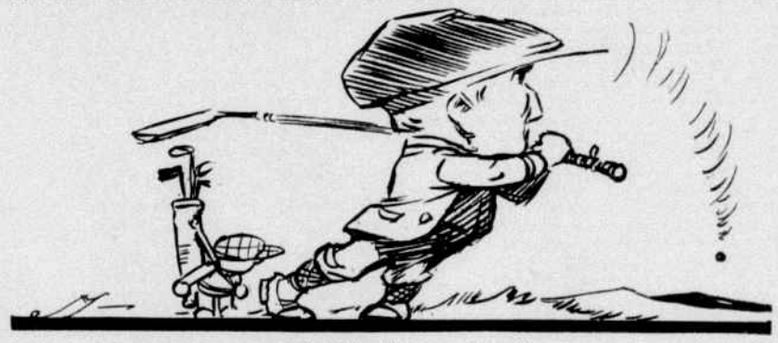
Such reactions are rather rare. The President doesn't go around displaying his "fighting face." Very much to the contrary. He is the politest of men. With all respect to and for the Middle West and to northern Ohio, his urbanity is remarkable for the part of the country he sprang from. His polish is not a common trait in that region. He has the social gift highly developed, and one of his greatest pleasures is in arranging small companies of congenial companions indoors and out. He likes to be with his "buddies," as he calls those men whose companionship has worn well. Among the gentlemen who enjoy this honor are several Senators—Fred Hale of Maine, Joseph S. Frelinghuysen of New Jersey, Davis Elkins of West Virginia. Albert



"Golf is his speed——"

B. Fall, now Secretary of the Interior, is still another of the President's pals, though Fall is even more—he is a sought-for and trusted counsellor on affairs of state, nobody in the whole Administration overmatching Fall's importance in this respect.

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The President likes to win at whatever he plays—golf, auction bridge, shuffleboard. He's a good loser in the sense that he takes defeat smilingly and always finds a few words of compliment for his victorious adversary; but at bottom it annoys him to come out second best. He's a very competitive person. He likes to match his skill and wits against the skill and wits of others, good, open, clean fighting, no biting or gouging or hitting under the belt. And at his games he is very frank—unusually so, I think, for persons regarded as great. That is, he is honest enough to take open, hearty satisfaction in his successes and in the methods used to gain success; the strategy. There is none of the hypocrite about him. At the same time he is equally frank in condemning himself for errors that may have lost the game. "That was a boneheaded piece of business" I have heard him say of his own tactics. Harding knows his limitations as well as any man so placed as he can ever frankly estimate them. He doesn't start in with any notion that he is a superman. He doesn't start in by advertising that he is the sole repository of the genius of his party. He seeks for advice, and in the campaign, and more importantly in the first ten weeks of his Presidency, he has displayed perfect willingness to take it. Witness the upstanding Charles E. Hughes, who is very much the Secretary of State and who distinctly is the President's adviser in matters of foreign policy, the President's adviser at the President's solicitation.

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There's nothing petty about the twenty-ninth President of these very much United States. He says that power, government, responsibility are not only big enough for many men, but absolutely demand the best judgment of many men. For him there will be none of this solitary agony business.

"His mind doesn't run on a single track."

He doesn't intend to put on a toga and ascend to a mountain top, blind and deaf to hints and advice from the common herd. Not he. That is not the way he got ahead in the world. His mind doesn't run on a single track, as he sees it. He keeps it in a roundhouse, where there are many tracks diverging out to convenient, sensible trunk-lines of thought and procedure. He would be annoyed if associates didn't go to him with suggestions, and the idea of snubbing or discouraging such aids would never occur to him. Friction may possibly develop in the Harding Cabinet, but it won't be because the President is "upstage," which is to say haughty or supercilious in the reception of suggestions. "I'd take advice from a yellow dog if that dog happened to know something I hadn't been able to find out" he said one time.

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He takes advice in large doses at least twice a week, for the Cabinet meetings on Tuesday and Friday are essentially meetings of "best minds. His Cabinet Ministers do not sit about the long table in the attitude of inferior men that dare not speak up for fear of being sat upon. His Cabinet Ministers are not like small boys, timid in the presence of teacher. They meet him prepared to speak their minds and to oppose him, if necessary. Can anybody imagine Hughes or Hoover in the character of "yes men," intellectual sycophants? Whatever comes up—railroads, Yap, income tax, labor, association of nations—is free ground for honest opinion. The President seeks it. He is prepared to accede whenever it approximates his own views or enlightens them to a better conclusion, or when his very definite notions of executive responsibility permit. Often he is a kind of arbitrator in Cabinet disputes, for while the ten department heads are working together in harmonious, sympathetic administration, there are strong personalities in the lot. They cannot always see things the same way. Some of them are used to expressing themselves pointedly. Here is where the President shines, for as a resolver of disputes he probably hasn't had an equal. Witness his political diplomacy in the course of a trying campaign.

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In this loosely written commentatory of traits and characteristics of the President, of matters that may be interesting to readers of THE NEW YORK HERALD, who may be presumed to be highly interested in whatever the President does or tries to do, the impression cannot be omitted that Harding considers that his greatest potential value to the nation is his faculty for "bringing men together." On one occasion, with mind and body pleasantly relaxed, he indulged in one of those intimate monologues that seem to rise from the very bottom of souls. He revealed his principal purpose in the Presidency: to make Americans think better of each other and to work together in better spirit for the good of their country. And he would like to expand this gentle philosophy to cover the world. That is, he would like to play a part in making the harmony of American citizenship an inspiration and example for the rest of the world. Nothing pays better than team work, the President believes. If in the course of the whole period of his Presidency he could bring about more sympathetic relations between capital and labor, create a feeling that would make bitter, senseless strikes and lockouts impossible, he would consider his work a success, a very great success. He has intimated that to this writer on more than one occasion.

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Harding is both materialist and idealist. This is merely using a mouthful of words to say that he is a very practical person, definitely acquainted with the life going on around him and with the simple and natural desires, fears, joys and troubles of his fellow men; yet a person who looks beyond the present day and decade and even beyond the boundaries of his own country toward a better day of more equalized human opportunities. He is a materialist because he knows that the hard facts of life are not to be tucked in a corner and painted over by thinking lovely thoughts alone. To get any sort of idealistic accomplishment horse sense has got to be used and the hard and fast facts of human life taken into account. Harding undoubtedly would have made a better deal idealistically as well as materially if he had sat in at Versailles. Here is another resemblance in a broad sort of way to the late President Roosevelt, who liked to look things straight in the face. It would be impossible for Harding to ride a hobby to its death and his own exhaustion simply to gratify an exclusive predilection. He might believe devoutly in the good of a theory, but if he sensed its impossibility of accomplishment he would not waste time due to other important matters in trying to whistle back the tide.

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There used to be an impression current that Harding was rather slow-minded; that he did not absorb ideas swiftly. This notion may have been corrected by this time. It was never the truth. The truth is that he is remarkably quick at "catching" an idea, remarkably swift of comprehension. But he habitually takes his time at reflection. I have known him to listen to a suggestion with no particular degree of attentiveness and then, weeks later, when it was supposed that all trace of the matter had passed from his mind, to recur to it in its original form, precisely stated, together with the answer or solution he had taken his time to evolve. He "gets one" speedily, but he seldom hurries to announce this. The President has a theory that a good deal of the trouble of the sons of Adam arises from their disposition toward hurried speech. His long political experience has taught him that the unexpected is the thing that usually happens. He is aware, therefore, that it is wise to allow as much time as it is possible to give to circumstances the turnover of time. He can make decisions rapidly enough, firmly enough. He prefers, whenever instant decision is not imperative, to "wait a bit."

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Take the whole League of Nations row. It may not be recalled now, but Harding's advice many months ago was to go slow on the League of Nations propositions until we could see what was coming out of the welter and turmoil in Europe; until we could see if the other fellows purposed to respect the treaties and covenants they had made. The soundness of that advice is recognized on the other side nowadays. As for his proposed association of nations, he takes the same line: that Europe, politically and economically, is unhealthy, feverish, inflamed, debilitated. He wants to "go slow" until Europe herself indicates what kind of association is going to be acceptable and workable. That the United States can and should take the moral leadership of the world he firmly believes, but he wants that leadership to be assumed on the invitation of a restored Europe that knows its own mind and that is not going to have a brainstorm every six months or so.

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No comment about the President or estimates formed of him after considerable association and study would be at all proper without saying something about his kind of Americanism. His kind of Ameri-

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